



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE, MAYOR

**STAFF**

MADELEINE MASTERS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*  
CHRISTOPHER DIORIO, *PLANNER/ZONING ADMINISTRATOR*  
LORI MASSA, *PLANNER/ZONING ADMINISTRATOR*  
FREDERICK J. LUND, *SENIOR DRAFTSMAN*

Case #: ZBA2003-07-R-0208  
Site: 49 Davis Square  
Date: 2 April 2008  
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

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**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

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**Applicant Name:** Sprint Wireless Broadband Company LLC, affiliate of Sprint Spectrum  
**Applicant Address:** 9 Crosby Drive, Bedford MA 01730  
**Property Owner Name:** (DBA) BF Properties  
**Property Owner Address:** P.O. Box 38026, Cambridge, MA 02238  
**Agent:** Ricardo M. Sousa, Esq.

Legal Notice: Applicant Sprint Wireless Broadband Company, LLC, and Owner DBA BF Properties are requesting a revision to the Special Permit # ZBA 2003-07 to modify existing wireless facility.

Zoning District/Ward: CBD zone. Ward 6.

Zoning Approval Sought: Revision to Special Permit # ZBA 2003-07

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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The original special permit allowed the application to install three roof-mounted antennas concealed within "stealth" canisters, two interior equipment cabinets, and one GPS antenna.

The proposed revisions are shown on the plans stamped in to OSPCD on February 19, 2008. Notices have been mailed to abutters and the case advertised in the newspaper.

The present application seeks to:

1. Add three WiMAX antennas, each concealed with a stealth canister
2. Add six lines of coax that will be routed and concealed inside an existing cable tray
3. Add one GPS antenna
4. Add two supporting equipment cabinets to be located in the existing equipment room
5. Add one Backhaul Dish

The Applicant has stated that the "...WiMAX technology will allow Sprint-Nextel subscribers wireless data delivery and reception capabilities at speeds currently seen with DSL and T-1 connectivity. This

installation will benefit the City of Somerville residents by offering a wireless option and increased competition to high speed data consumers.”

The site is a local landmark—the historic Somerville Theatre. The original permit was reviewed in consultation with the Historic Preservation Commission in order to design a facility that would minimize impacts to the structure; the present proposal would include the same type of canister sheathing, which resembles a metal vent pipe. Additional equipment would be located out of public view in the existing interior equipment room.

While individually the canisters are fairly innocuous, Staff have had concerns about their profusion on the roof, and asked the Applicant to house the new antennas in the existing canisters; the Applicant states that this cannot be done but has pushed them further back from the roof's edge as required by the Ordinance. The new antennas will be paired with the existing antennas in three “sectors”: the Alpha sector at the front-right corner of the roof; the Beta sector in the center; and the Gamma sector at the back-left corner.

The central Beta sector is not visible and the additional structure would not be expected to be visible. The new antenna in the Gamma sector would be immediately adjacent to and further set back from the existing antenna, which is only visible from limited locations, and is a less prominent building approach and therefore is not expected to add any significant visual impact. The Alpha sector, located toward the front of the building, is the area that would require the most attention, as it is visible from two approaches to the Square (Highland Avenue and Holland Street) and may be visible from the College Avenue T station exit. Reviews of plans while considering views moving along these streets, it appears that the additional Alpha sector canister/antenna will only be visible from a limited number of vantages (on Holland Street between Winter Street and the T Station, and on Highland Avenue between Grove Street and the first traffic light); nevertheless it appears that there are sufficient other visual distractions in these locations to minimize its effect.

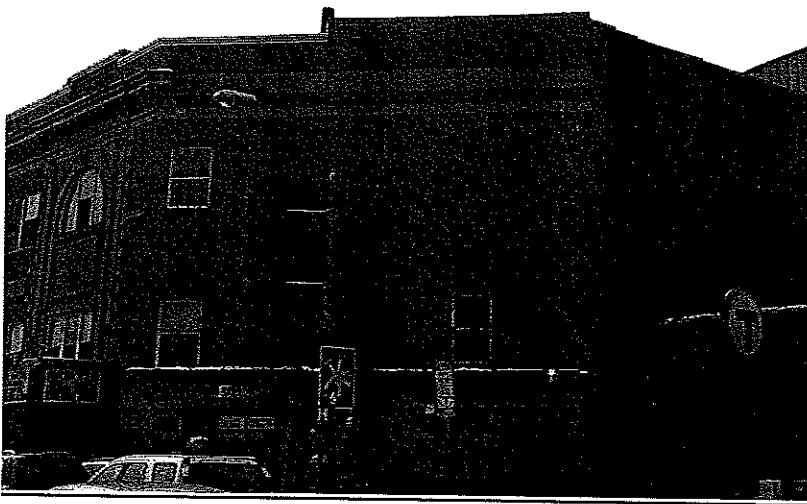
In response to a staff request, the Applicant is proposing a lower installation of the (approximately two cubic-foot) backhaul dish, which would be mounted on a higher portion of wall that projects from the roof (in which the equipment room is also located) and painted to match.

Finally, a four-foot-tall GPS antenna is proposed to be located adjacent to another existing one, mounted in to the cable tray. The antenna, which is less than three inches in diameter, is shown as 12 feet from the rear edge of the roof, and 28 feet from the left edge, in both cases shielded by a parapet wall. It would not be visible from street level.

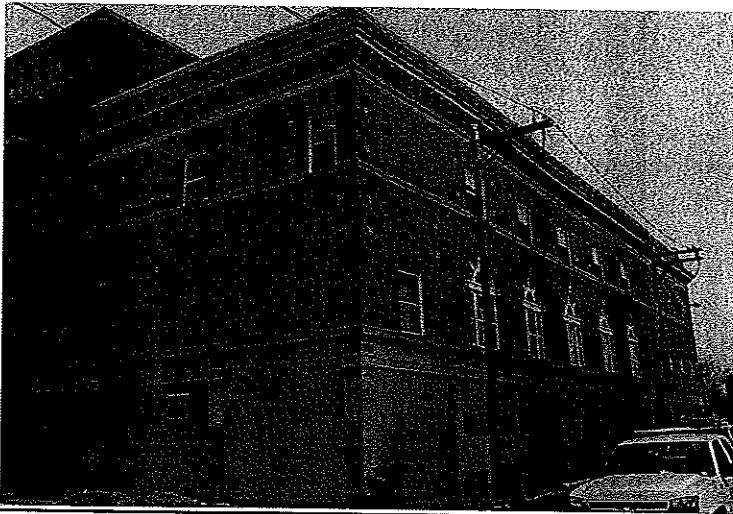
While what is proposed is expected to have a nominal effect on the appearance of the building from most points of view, there will be some visual effect. Such an iconic structure in the City should not be expected to bear much more visual clutter than what is now proposed. Staff recommend that any future equipment that would be visible from any street-level location in the Square be subject to scrutiny by an expert consultant advising the Board (pursuant to M.G.L. Ch. 44 Section 53G) prior to granting approval. Furthermore, a Certificate of Appropriateness will be required, in addition to this approval, prior to the granting of a Building Permit.



*View from Davis Square Plaza (above) and Davis Square T Station (below), with existing canister visible*



*Below: View of rear from Dover Street, with existing canister and GPS antennas invisible*



## II. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the preceding and following a site visit, Planning Staff finds that the changes are consistent with the original special permit and recommends approval. The original conditions attached to the Special Permit would still apply and are repeated here, modified to reflect the current plans, and with additional conditions 5 and 6 relating to review of future addition of facilities and Historic Preservation Commission review of the current proposal.

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (Initial)	Notes
1.	Approval is for a wireless communication facility and based on plans dated 02-21-08 and stamped into O.S.P.C.D. on March 28, 2008. Any alterations to these plans must be submitted to the Zoning Board of Appeals for review and approval;	BP/CO	ISD/PLNG	
2.	All stealth vent pipes and equipment cabinets must be painted to match, as closely as possible, the surrounding colors and materials of the building;	BP/CO	ISD/PLNG	
3.	Prior to a request for final sign-off on a building permit, the Applicant must obtain an updated Certificate of Compliance from the Fire Prevention Bureau;	CO	FP	
4.	Any antenna that is not operated continuously for a period of twelve (12) months shall be considered abandoned, and the owner of such antenna shall remove the same within ninety (90) days of notice from the City of Somerville informing the owner of such abandonment.	CONT.	ISD	
5.	No further equipment, which is visible from street level from anywhere in the Square, shall be installed without review, at the Applicant's expense, of alternative or hidden siting and a determination that there is sufficient need for that unique site.	CONT.	ISD	
6.	A Certificate of Appropriateness is required from the Historic Preservation Commission.	BP	HPC	
7.	The Applicant is responsible for notifying the Planning Staff at least five (5) working days in advance of a request for a final sign-off on a building permit from the Division of Inspectional Services. Issuance of a building permit shall be contingent upon a satisfactory inspection of site work by the Planning Staff to ensure consistency with the submitted proposal and compliance with all the conditions of this special permit.	CO	PLNG	